RELEASE: Fashion industry must take action to address exploitation in the textile supply chain

Grassroots initiative calls on brands and retailers to do more to tackle exploitative working conditions within textile spinning mills in Tamil Nadu

12 October 2020 – International brands and retailers sourcing yarn and fabric from Tamil Nadu must take steps to address severe exploitation in their textile supply chain, announced a coalition of over 100 grassroots organisations today.

Tamil Nadu, in southern India, is a textile manufacturing hub producing yarn and fabric destined for the supply chains of European and US brands and retailers. With over 2,000 mills employing approximately 280,000 workers, the industry is a vital source of jobs in the region. Yet for many years civil society groups have documented exploitative practices occurring within textile spinning mills in Tamil Nadu. Excessive and involuntary overtime, extremely low wages, physical and sexual violence and restriction of freedom of movement – many of which are indicators of forced labour – are known to occur in some parts of the industry.

To date, there has been limited action by international brands and retailers to identify and address rights violations like these that are taking place beyond tier 1 of their supply chain. A widespread lack of transparency and visibility of conditions in textile processing and manufacturing sites has hindered civil society efforts to work with brands to improve the situation of workers in the industry.

Developed by the Tamil Nadu Alliance, a coalition of civil society networks representing more than 100 grassroots groups supporting textile workers, the Tamil Nadu Declaration highlights the need for sustained action by brands and retailers to address exploitative practices in textile spinning mills. A call to action on international brands and retailers sourcing from the region, it sets out a roadmap of five goals identified by the Tamil Nadu Alliance as essential to build a rights-respecting textile industry:

1. Expand supply chain transparency to all textile manufacturing facilities
2. Support the effective implementation of labour laws and protections in Tamil Nadu
3. Adopt sustainable sourcing and purchasing models that promote decent working conditions throughout the supply chain
4. Integrate worker-driven approaches to monitor compliance with labour standards
5. Support the development of a collective grievance mechanism in Tamil Nadu

“Brands have a vital role in ending exploitation of women and adolescent girls in textile spinning mills in Tamil Nadu. As textile production resumes in the wake of covid-19, workers are even more vulnerable to exploitative practices including forced labour. Through the Declaration we are calling on brands to work with us as the Tamil Nadu Alliance to build a stronger, more sustainable textile sector. Collaborative action between business and grassroots civil society is essential to support the industry ensure the effective protection of textile workers’ rights” – Tamil Nadu Alliance

“Clothing brands and retailers are one of the critical stakeholders in the supply chain, from cotton to garments. They wield influence in the operations of mills, which they should leverage to address workplace issues and listen to the needs of voiceless workers within mills.” – Former textile worker and bonded labour survivor

The Tamil Nadu Alliance has reached out to more than 60 international brands and retailers sourcing from textile mills in Tamil Nadu to encourage them to sign up to the Declaration.

As a first step, the Tamil Nadu Alliance is asking signatory brands to publicly disclose a list of textile manufacturing sites in the supply chain and support policy implementation efforts to protect mill workers rights. A list of companies that sign the Declaration will be published on the Tamil Nadu Declaration website.

For more information visit www.tamilnadudeclaration.org

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For more information and interviews, please contact info@tamilnadudeclaration.org

Notes to Editors

About the Tamil Nadu Alliance
The Tamil Nadu Alliance is a coalition of civil society networks working in Tamil Nadu to improve the conditions of workers in the textile supply chain. It was established in 2017 and has five members: Campaign against Camp Coolie System (CACCS), Freedom Fund (FF), Multi-Stakeholder Initiative - Tamil Nadu (MSI-TN), Migrant Workers Rights Coalition (MWRC) and Tirupur Peoples Forum for environment and labour rights (TPF). The Alliance represents over 100 grassroots organisations from these networks.

The mission of the Tamil Nadu Alliance is to promote fair and equitable labour standards in the textile supply chain in Tamil Nadu. It aims to promote collective initiatives toward better policy
implementation for workers’ rights and to facilitate sharing of best practices among all stakeholders.